

# AmeriCorps IN Action

## My AmeriCorps Story

In 2004, after five very long years of attendance at a graduate school in Atlanta, Georgia, I completed two degrees—a Master of Divinity and a Master of Arts in Christian Education. The remarkable feat is not the completion of the degrees; it is the fact that my mother was able to witness my graduation.

My mother was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer approximately six weeks into the beginning of my graduate studies. During my graduate years, her world consisted of a roller coaster of treatments including several rounds of chemotherapy and radiation, surgeries, and a flurry of activity surrounding all the treatments. Additional challenges included mountains of paperwork for insurance companies, calls to social service agencies for assistance, and negotiating with her employer for time off.

When I graduated from



*Johanna Amefia-Koffi,  
AmeriCorps VISTA*

seminary in 2004, I knew I wanted to do something more than just “work a job for pay.” During my time in graduate school, I volunteered with an organization named Hands On Atlanta (HOA). I noticed an opportunity within HOA to serve as an AmeriCorps Service Leader and thought it would be a good fit with the skills I had gained through seminary and previous volunteer work. I applied and was accepted for service during the 2004-2005 academic year.

I served at a public middle school in Atlanta as a classroom assistant

and small group math tutor. The service was challenging. This school had been on the needs improvement list for several years and many students struggled with the very basics in mathematics. This meant tutoring in early morning and after school sessions. The best part of the year, besides working with my team members, was seeing students actually grasp a concept and having their behavior improve as a result of understanding what is actually taking place in class.

My mother’s condition, however, worsened. She moved into stage three breast cancer which meant more aggressive chemotherapy given more frequently. Although my AmeriCorps experience had been enlightening and I loved being in Atlanta, I needed to

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move closer to home. I, also wanted to learn additional skills to transition to the nonprofit arena.

I learned of the AmeriCorps \*VISTA program through our statewide closing ceremony and began researching opportunities in Indianapolis. I came across an opportunity with the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI); I applied immediately and was accepted as an AmeriCorps

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## My AmeriCorps Story

\*VISTA member.

During my term of service with the OFBCI, I have had the opportunity to participate in many activities including coordinating volunteers for a service activity of the Governor's Conference for Service and Volunteerism, researching Indiana's volunteer structure, and assisting a smaller non-profit to build its capacity. This AmeriCorps year has been equally as challenging as my AmeriCorps year in Georgia.

However, the most challenging part of the year has been trying to balance service with the demands of my mother's care. Many basic aspects of daily living (picking up mail, taking out trash, laundry, cleaning, etc.) were completed by me because my mother was unable to complete them due to the effects of chemotherapy. My mother has been hospitalized twice during this service year and at one point within the year, I considered dropping service in order to provide more direct atten-

tion to meet her physical and medical demands.

Upon her second hospitalization, a social worker came to my mother's room to ask if she had any needs with which she could assist. My mother stated that she needed some assistance during the hours in which I served at OFBCI. The social worker gave us three resources—one of which was Senior Companions.

Senior Companions is a branch of national service that assist older adults and those with disabilities and terminal illnesses to live independently in their own homes or communities. We contacted them immediately and my mother was inter-

viewed by the Senior Companion program director (who had a loved one battled cancer).

A Senior Companion by the name of Ola Coulson had recently become available who lived right around the corner from my mother. They were a perfect fit for each other and since March, "Ms. Ola" as she is affectionately called has helped my mother with daily chores as well as provided companionship during the day. Though my mother has cancer, her physical and emotional well-being has improved tremendously as a result of these visits and my peace of mind has been restored.

I will complete my service on August 18<sup>th</sup> and though I have learned much throughout the year, the best part of AmeriCorps has been seeing how each branch of national service aids in getting things done for those in need. For me, service has come full circle—I gave and have re-

ceived. The slogan on a t-shirt I received during my AmeriCorps year in Georgia has become true—"Service is the answer."



*Laura Amefia-Koffi with her Senior Companion "Ms. Ola"*



**Don't forget the  
2006  
AmeriCorps  
Opening  
Ceremony  
will be held  
October 17-18,  
2006 at  
Waycross  
Episcopal Camp  
and  
Conference  
Center.**



*Senior Companion  
Ola Coulson*

## AmeriCorps Member of the Month-Lynette VanBrandt-EnviroCorps

Lynette VanBrandt is a second year AmeriCorps member with EnviroCorps. She currently serves as a team leader. After completing her bachelor's degree in Environmental Science in 2004, she joined the EnviroCorps program.

Lynette's days are filled with helping members complete their project objectives, teaching school children about the environment, organizing river clean ups, and as-

sisting with invasive species control.

"Habitat restoration is a slow process, which means one may never get to see the results of their efforts. Yet, I remember the day last winter when the team had finally cleared an area at the local nature preserve. We had labored in that little piece of land for many days, cutting and treating invasive trees. When the last tree fell, I saw the smiles on my team members' faces. It was a moment when I was not only reminded of what a few people can do together, but also how a few people can impact the environment."

Lynette VanBrandt  
EnviroCorps member

"Lynette has been a wonderful addition to EnviroCorps bringing



*Lynette VanBrandt, September's AmeriCorps Member of the Month*

*strength of character, tenacity and passion to all with whom she serves with. She is highly dedicated to improving the world around her. She is a leader in the program and community at large."*

Megan Kolaczyk

Program Coordinator, EnviroCorps



involve and educate the community about local environmental issues. Members serve with the City of Elkhart Public Works and Utilities, the Elkhart Environmental Center, The Nature Conservancy, the Elkhart Community School Corporation and various local organizations.

For more information about EnviroCorps, please visit [http://elkhartindiana.org/content.php?id=12&c\\_id=67](http://elkhartindiana.org/content.php?id=12&c_id=67)



*Lynette assists with Earth Day Celebration*

## Program of the Month: EnviroCorps

In 1995, EnviroCorps welcomed its first AmeriCorps members to the City of Elkhart. During the last 11 years, EnviroCorps has developed programs which engage the community in environmental issues.

AmeriCorps members engage youth and community groups in three areas of service focused on the environment: environmental education, restoration of natural areas, and environmental volunteerism (community involvement). Members and volunteers lead nature hikes and experiential learning activities for area youth, implement water conservation devices and techniques in area homes, conduct projects and hold community events that



*EnviroCorps members focus on environmental issues.*

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# The AmeriCorps Pledge



I will bring Americans together  
to strengthen our communities.

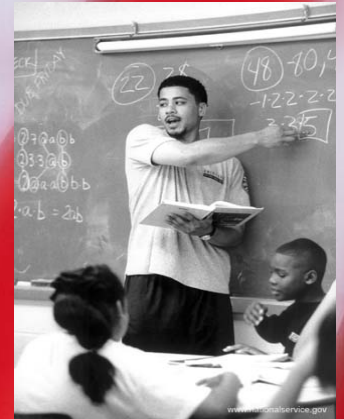


Faced with apathy,  
I will take action.



Faced with conflict,  
I will seek common ground.

Faced with adversity,  
I will persevere.



I will carry this commitment  
with me this year and beyond.



I am an AmeriCorps member,  
and I will get things done.



## Welcome New AmeriCorps Members and Programs!

*"Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth."*

-Shirley Chisholm

The Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives would like to welcome all new and returning AmeriCorps members and programs. Your commitment to a year of national service is commendable.

The 2006-2007 AmeriCorps grantees are **Boys and Girls**



**Clubs of Indianapolis, Indianapolis Coalition for Neighborhood Development, Scott County Partnership, Workforce Development Strategies, Indianapolis Housing Agency, Peace Learning Center, Franklin College, Indiana State University, Indiana Uni-**

**versity, Habitat for Humanity, City of Elkhart, Harmony Education Center and Indiana Department of Health.**

Over 50,000 AmeriCorps members serve each year in communities across the United States and impact thousands of lives everyday. Since its inception in 1994, over 400,000 Americans have answered the call to service. Welcome to AmeriCorps! It is going to be a great year!

## September 2006: Important Dates

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| September 4, 2006  | Labor Day, OFBCI Closed   |
| September 8, 2006  | 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM at Indianapolis Government Center Conference Center<br>"Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster" conducted by The Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network |
| September 11, 2006 | Periodic Expense Reports Due  |
| September 15, 2006 | Monthly Program Directors' Training<br>Performance Measurement/APR & Evaluation<br>8:30am-4:00pm Indiana Governmental Center, Room A  |



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